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ABSTRACT

Fourth in a series of profiles documenting the practices of 24 institutions, this report describes Syracuse University's Center for Instructional Development, which spearheads the campus-wide determination to find better ways of teaching and learning. The Center relies not on hardware but on the force of its ideas and the willingness of the university to support them. Projects range from the redesign of entire courses to the curriculum of an entire program such as music education. The Center's role illustrates the benefits of an "instructional design team" approach. An additional role in providing a campus climate in which radical innovation can occur is illustrated by the way the registrar's office has responded to the need for more flexible recordkeeping. The Center's services are provided at no charge to individual departments and schools of the university to encourage maximum efforts to improve instruction. Organizationally, it consists of six units: Development; Research and Evaluation; Project Advance; Graphics and Printing; an Independent Learning Laboratory; and Test-Scoring and Evaluation. The Center's record of accomplishment seems to have made it an established part of the academic administration. (LBH)

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Educational Technology Revisited

PROFILE 4

Instructional Unit Offers Ideas not Hardware to Spur Change

There are now two decades of experience with the use of instructional technology in colleges and universities. This profile of Syracuse University's Center for Instructional Development is the fourth in a series of profiles documenting the practices of two dozen institutions. A look at their experience may benefit others considering new ways to teach. This report, written by Ronald Gross of the Academy for Educational Development, and the other reports in this series, are supported by a special grant to EFL from the Ford Foundation.

Many colleges and universities are committed on paper to constantly improving their methods of instruction, but few have found ways to implement this commitment effectively. At Syracuse University, a uniquely potent Center for Instructional Development spearheads the campus-wide determination to find better ways of teaching and learning. The Center does not depend on elaborate "hardware" or a massive funding. It relies on the force of its ideas and on the willingness of the University to back them up.

A Force for Change

Perhaps the two most significant things about the Center are its name—the phrase "instructional *development*" was chosen to avoid the machine-media connotations of "technology"—and the fact that its 10-person professional staff has the high level leadership of an assistant vice-chancellor who reports directly to the same academic vice-chancellor as the University's deans.

"Our high placement in the academic administration of this University is the key to the success we've had," says director Robert Diamond. "Our funding, equipment, and facilities are modest compared to many such units on campuses around the country. But topside support gives us the claim on necessary resources, the clout, and the range of expertise required to implement major changes. We can provide support for course development and evaluation, dollars for faculty release time, and a continual reminder throughout the institution that change is needed and possible."

In its operation, the Center has very consciously chosen to focus sharply on a relatively few shrewdly-chosen projects. "The shotgun approach doesn't work," Diamond asserts. "Supporting a lot of small, unrelated efforts through grants to individual faculty members and departments may make a lot of friends for the staff and keep them busy, but the total and lasting effects will be minimal. Your innovative professor may get a better job—sometimes just because he *is* innovative—and his project goes with him. You need to find situations where a whole department or school is willing to commit itself to major changes that will stay in place once they prove their worth. That's the only way to affect the whole institution."

So the Center's projects are large in scope, ranging from the redesign of entire courses like Introduction to Religion, Freshman English Composition, Psychology, Communications and Society, or a 2-year Calculus sequence, to the curriculum of an entire program such as Music Education or the first year in the School of Architecture.

Options for Students

The way the Center works is well-illustrated by the redesign of "Introduction to the Study of Religion," a typical lower-level large-enrollment course through which students can fulfill part of their humanities requirement.

"We were herding 700 students a year through this course a few years ago," recalls William Hall, former chairman of the department. "It was straight lecture—deadly, many-a-time—and the exams all had to be

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strictly multiple-choice. Some of us realized this was educationally unsound and ethically irresponsible. There had to be a better way."

At this time, back in the late 60's, the Center was just being established on campus, partially in response to student pressure for reform. Bob Diamond was initiating discussions throughout the University to acquaint faculty members with the ways his new unit might help them, and it sounded promising to Hall. What happened when the two got together exemplifies the Center's philosophy of "instructional development."

Rather than looking at separate units of the course and thinking about how this or that might be "mediated"—taught by television, programmed into a self-teaching text, recorded on cassettes, etc.—the Center's staff sat down over an extended period with the professors to discuss basics. "The questions Bob and his staff raised with us were simple, but intellectually devastating," says Professor Hall. "They simply asked us what we really wanted to accomplish through the course, how we wanted the students to change, what we thought we might have students *do* that would really cause them to change in those ways, and how we thought we might measure whether or not we were achieving results. Some of us got mad at the questions—all of us were disconcerted. But it got us started in a logical way that has led to a completely new way of conducting the entire course."

The new way illustrates most of the characteristics which recur most often in Center projects. The key is to offer students a generous choice of *options*—different ways of proceeding through the course, which they choose according to their personal learning styles and interests.

After three introductory class meetings required of all new students, each student selects one of three options, each consisting of a four-week series. Subsequently, the student selects two more four-week segments. Students who have completed the required parts of the course can also earn additional credit hours by taking optional mini-courses.

The options vary both in content and in the way they are taught, and students are encouraged to make their choices with both in mind. For example, the range in subjects is from forms of religious expression such as Myth, Ritual, Sacred Text, and Mysticism, through issues like Evil, God, and the Future, to questions of approach like the Sociology, History, Psychology, or Philosophy of Religion. But the *ways* of learning also vary widely, from conventional classroom lectures to one option taught entirely through the student's independent use of a manual, tape-slide materials, a workbook, and a series of selected readings, with no attendance required (athough two optional discussion meetings are held).

It's interesting to note that while individual modules make use of various kinds of machines and media—films, audio tapes, programmed texts—such devices are *not* integral to the concept. What *is* basic is the Center's process of instructional development: the clear articulation of goals and objectives, the logical and creative deployment of activities to achieve the goals, the responsiveness to student's individual needs and interests, and the constant evaluation used as feedback to improve the product. In short, this is instructional technology as a rational and imaginative approach to making instruction more effective, rather than instructional technology as the use of machines and media.

It's also fun. "The data shows that our students are learning more," says Professor Hall. "But I wouldn't really care—I *know* that we faculty, and the kids too, are enjoying the work a hell of a lot more! The students get exposure to three different teachers, they can experiment with learning in three different ways, they have some real choices to make, they can gear their work to topics which appeal to them. And I've seen a lovely renewal in most of the teachers involved. We get to teach things we're particularly turned-on by, to smaller groups of more interested students. It's given us ideas for new offerings, new ways of teaching, even some ideas for our research and writing. I don't need regression analyses to tell me this is a better way to do things."

The new course is not without problems. Students complain of the brevity of the modules, which they feel fragments the subject, and makes it difficult to probe deeply or to build up a personal relationship with the professor. (The latest turn designed to address some of these problems, is a core experience for all students which will slice through the entire semester, providing more unity to the whole experience.) The work-load also tends to be heavy for some students: they often have to read two tough books and produce two papers for each module, which is stiffer than the customary course requirements at the University.

The Center's Role

The Center's role in all this illustrates the benefits of an "instructional design team" approach. Its staff, made up of experts in educational communications, helped the Religion group to explore the wide range of technologies and patterns of organization that might be used. It helped them choose the offering of diverse modules. And it worked with each individual faculty member (five of the fifteen-member department were involved in this introductory course) to create their own mini-courses and other options. The professors were assisted in writing brief prospectuses for their offerings: if students want previews they can buy them for $1.00 at the bookstore.

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The Center's other role—providing a campus climate in which such radical innovation can occur—is illustrated by the way the registrar's office has responded to the need for more flexible record-keeping. On most campuses, an innovation like the Religion course—which involves room assignments which keep changing during the semester, students signing up for different parts of a course at different times, for different amounts of credit and separate grades, and the choice of adding on more credit through optional mini-courses—would swamp the average registrar's office.

But, at Syracuse, the Center involves the registrar in such projects from the beginning. Registrar Carole Barone not only permits and enables such innovations to flourish, but has developed, with the Center's help, a whole new system of registration and student record-keeping which permits this and more. Further, she has offered such options to the entire faculty to encourage them to re-design their courses to better serve their instructional purposes, rather than being constrained to fit the Procrustean patterns of the past. "Our purpose here is to get the bureaucracy out of the way of the innovative professor or department," she says. Under Syracuse's tuition system, undergraduate students pay a flat tuition fee which covers anywhere from 12-19 credits. Once registered, students can select additional credit options as late as nine weeks into the semester, permitting them to earn additional credit and finish a term's work at their own pace—or spread it over to the next semester without penalty.

Moreover, courses and mini-courses can begin and end whenever desired during the semester, or carry over from one term to another. Within a given course students can get separate grades and credit for different units, and such units may carry different credit-weights. And separate units within courses can be set up, offered, and students enrolled at any point throughout the semester.

Ms. Barone admits that most registrars are unlikely to share her attitude, but she believes such administrative flexibility is essential if innovation is to go forward, let alone be encouraged. Asked what can be done if a registrar flatly resists change, she says: "Change the registrar."

Such an attitude supportive of change is necessary in every part of the University, CID director Diamond believes. "We have got to find ways to identify the productive units of an institution," he argues. "The central administration must have ways of evaluating the academic departments and of providing increased support to those areas that can justify expansion. Faculty and departments who produce must be rewarded. As priorities change, so must the criteria for promotions and salary increases."

Mission and Structure

The Center's services are provided at no charge to individual departments and schools of the University. This policy has been instituted to encourage maximum efforts to improve instruction, and to eliminate the snarls associated with charge-back systems. It is estimated that each year the Center and its associated AV support unit provides over $20,000 of support services that were formerly charged to the budgets of the departments using the services.

The mission of the Center is carefully defined as the improvement of instructional *quality*. Of course, hopes are expressed that many redesigned courses will generate more student credit hours without any additional increase in instructional costs. "But we don't think of the Center as primarily a cost-cutting operation," says Ken Goodrich, the Dean of Arts and Sciences in whose School most of the course redesign has occurred. "We were glad to see the Center find alternatives to our large lecture classes. But not because they were expensive. They're relatively cheap. The problem was they were dull! The Center gives us more of a bang for the same bucks."

Organizationally, the center has six units.

- A key one is Development, which consist of four full-time professionals who are responsible for working with departments on major projects. Their task is to choose which projects the Center should undertake, to plan and design them in collaboration with the departments and faculty members involved, to call on the Center's technical staff and resources as needed, and to bear responsibility for the quality, integrity, and efficiency of each project under their supervision. Each project has one of the Center's top professional staff members in charge, and that person is responsible for every aspect of the project until it is completed and phased into the regular operation of the academic department.
- The second major unit of the Center is the Research and Evaluation office. The Center staff considers it especially significant that evaluation is an on-going, in-house function, built into every project from its inception. Many such centers on other campuses do not have such a full-time evaluation unit—it's considered quite a luxury—and depend instead on *ad hoc* help from the office of institutional research, or elsewhere. But at Syracuse it is considered vital for the research experts to be in at the start to help define objectives, design especially appropriate measurement instruments, and monitor the progress of the project throughout.

The purpose is primarily to assist those involved in the project to make it better as it goes along, rather than simply to come in at the end and announce whether it worked or not: it's a kind of educational quality control, through which the Center strives to avoid mere improvisation and piecemeal change. But the usual kind of evaluation—terminal appraisals of how good the product turned out to be, particularly in comparison with some other solution to the problem—is eschewed at Syracuse. "Comparative course evaluations are very expensive," says Ed Kelley, the Center's associate director for research and evaluation, "and they don't really tell us very much. Frankly, I've rarely seen policy

decisions based on them. That decision is usually made on the basis of a consensus of informed opinion which gradually evolves in a certain department or school. The best that our data can do is to help make the product better, and to create a more informed forum for discussion in arriving at a total judgement."

- A third major part of the Center is Project Advance, one of the largest high school-college articulation programs in the country, enrolling over 2,000 students in 40 school districts throughout New York State. Project Advance grew out of the campus activities of the Center. The Project offers selected university courses to high school students for regular Syracuse University credit. These courses are taught by university-trained and supervised high school teachers as part of their regular teaching load and as a part of the students' normal academic program. The project operates on a break-even basis, thereby allowing the charge to students for university overhead and credit to be modest. First field tested in the fall of 1973, the project had by 1974 expanded to nearly 40 school districts with continued expansion anticipated.
- A Graphics and Printing unit is the fourth element in the Center. Staffed by three professional artists, it handles all layout and design activities. As time permits, this unit also produces materials, at no charge, for faculty to use in the classrooms. Significantly, though, most of the media support units of the University are located in an Audio and Visual Support Services unit separate from the Center, but which reports to it. Originally all campus audio and visual services were centralized in the Center, but this caused too much confusion about the Center's distinctive mission in instructional *development*, so in 1973 it was moved out.
- A fifth component of the Center is an Independent Learning Laboratory, a 78-station facility used primarily to field-test the initial drafts of new material before being used on students at large. The Lab is designed to permit students to use instructional sequences that utilize various media, ranging from audio tapes and simple programmed booklets, to tape/slides, film, and multi-media sequences; each week the Lab averages 1,000 student sign-ins for up to 30 courses. In addition, seven of the University's computer terminals are located near the Lab to permit use of computer simulations and various computational techniques.
- A sixth unit, added recently, is Test-Scoring and Evaluation. This also provides for student ratings of faculty, which faculty members are free to use on a voluntary basis.

The Center is staffed not only by the full-time professionals, but also by Fellows in Instructional Development—faculty members whose time is recompensed, with the approval of appropriate department chairmen and deans, through the use of discretionary funds at the Center's disposal. Usually, six to eight faculty are awarded these fellowships each year and are paid for a period during the summer at a rate equivalent to their regular salary. Individual department also provide support for additional faculty to work on developmental projects, and graduate interns from the School of Education serve in the Center as well.

Rewards of Success

The Center's record of accomplishment seems to have made it an established part of the academic administration at Syracuse. (It is financed with $275,000 per year in "hard money" from the regular University budget—not by outside grants which may come and go.) This year the University Senate's budget committee, reexamining every major activity to decide where to belt-tighten, commissioned a study of whether the Center deserves continued support. Since the study revealed overwhelming endorsement on campus among faculty members and departments which had worked with the Center, the CID's future looks bright.

While the endemic budget squeeze makes it unrealistic for the Center to request or anticipate major expansion in the foreseeable future, the demand for its services on the part of the University's departments and schools has increased and, even more important, the faculty is thinking in larger terms. Four years ago many of the requests were for help in designing units or parts of courses that seemed troublesome; now, the proposals are for broad-scale development of whole curricula.

"A Center like this one can be established by any small institution," says Diamond. (Syracuse enrolls 10,000 undrgraduates and with only a modest endowment, derives most of its operating income from tuition.) "It would take an initial investment of under $60,000 and some of that would be resources and people already available, merely needing to be redeployed and focused in a new way. Instructional development is much more a matter of institutional commitment than of throwing money or media at your problems."

—Ronald Gross

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For the following documents, write to: Syracuse University Printing Services, 125 College Place, Syracuse, N.Y. 13210

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY'S CENTER FOR INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Its Role, Organization and Procedures, Center for Instructional Development, Syracuse University, 1975. $1.50

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